

HIERARCHICAL DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS/ACCOMMODATIONS/MODIFICATIONS

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Least Restrictive Environment vs. Least Restrictive Supports/ Accommodations/Modifications

Least restrictive environment is a common term in special education to communicate that all students should be educated as much as possible in the same physical environment as their peers. Least restrictive supports/accommodations and modifications should also be in place and are inherent in the philosophy of least restrictive-ness. A hierarchy of differentiated interventions, supports, adaptations proceeds from no special supports or adaptations for a specific subject matter or class, through maintaining the student in a physical environment with his/her peers, but providing an entirely functional curriculum for the student with severe disabilities. Neither behavior supports/behavior interventions, nor curricular adaptations encompassing accommodations and modifications should EVER be instituted in lieu of appropriate systematic skilled instruction that allows the student to maximize learning rate by gaining new skills.

Special Education Balancing Acts

Special education must balance between: 1) keeping the student with his peers with or without supports, and 2) providing specialized instruction, often requiring systematic re-teaching of previously inadequately learned basic skills. All educators struggle with the balance, with a very real danger inherent in a pendulum swinging too widely to either pole. For example, an over emphasis on accommodations might result in failure to systematically instruct in the basic skills that would lessen the very need for accommodations! An over emphasis on remediation and systematic basic skills instruction may result in less exposure to material others are learning if the remediation is occurring during the regular school day. This may therefore result in reducing the students' exposure to the required curriculum that culminates in the high school exit exam. It also contributes to the students' sense that their removal was due to a global inability on their part. This reduces effort, and belief in ability to succeed, which reduces outcomes. Learning to read comes first; reading to learn comes second. The older the student, the more difficulty teachers experience in providing a balanced, effective educational approach.

Hierarchical Decision Making on Supports and Curricular Adaptations

The following guide proceeds from nothing special for this student, in this class, through alternative curriculum for severe disabilities provided in an environment in which peers are working on core curriculum, with the ultimate goal of graduating from high school with a diploma. Least restrictive-ness logically proceeds from minor redirection and minor behavior support, through actual changes in the way teaching occurs and changes to what is taught. Behavior support is the beginning scaffold, with transition to accommodation/modification planning to occur when these changes alone do not remove impediments to learning. Accommodations that do not substantially alter a standard are considered well before substantially altered materials or instructional goals are considered.

1. Needs nothing special in this class

Ask: Can the student participate successfully in this activity just like the other students?

2. Change in something in the instruction/environment affecting everyone accommodates this student

Ask: Can changes that benefit all students in this class likely result in effectively accommodating this student's learning difference? Will this increase the student's:

- participation ?
- task completion?
- quality of work?
- motivation enhancement?

Ask: Can classroom organization and instructional practice benefit all students? Does enhancing fun, freedom, empowerment, belonging opportunities for all students accommodate this student's learning difference?

- access to reinforcing activities following this lesson?
- praise increase for everyone?
- scaffolding for everyone?
- strategy-based instruction for everyone?
- PALS? Peer Assisted Learning Strategies?

3. Change in individualized access to reinforcers that provide: fun, freedom, empowerment, belonging (i.e., behavior support) accommodates this student's learning difference

Ask: What does this student really seek in this environment, or protest in this environment? Would a change in the student's ability to get basic needs met in this environment address his/her learning difference?

- increasing relevance of learning for this student,
- providing freedom (of movement, of pacing of task completion),
- enhancing his/her ability to achieve status in the group for individual achievement (e.g., a "Pit Crew" program)

4. Can the student participate with additional environmental accommodations (level of support from peers, teacher, and other adults? level of engagement/participation)

Ask: What will enhance engagement and motivation; what will support sustaining student's attention to task completion?

- enhance participation?
- enhance support? (peers, adults, partners)
- enhance home/school communication and parental role in reinforcing progress?

5. Can the student participate with *INPUT* or *OUTPUT* adaptations?

Ask: What will assist the student in better understanding the instruction and assist the student in demonstrating what was learned?

- Input adaptations? (scaffolds: advanced organizers; strategy-based instruction, preteaching) and/or
- Output adaptations?

6. Can the student learn better and demonstrate that knowledge with changes in *TIME* allotted for work and/or testing?

Ask: Can the student demonstrate the standard after additional time to complete work? After redoing assignments or completing alternate assignments to demonstrate mastery (i.e., more time to master the material)?

7. Can the student master the material without completing all the work assigned? Reduce QUANTITY.

Ask: Accommodation: Can the student demonstrate the standard even though less quantity of work is produced? Modification: Can the student master some essential standards with extra assistance and reduction in number of standards taught? Beware: reduction in standards taught will likely affect ability to pass CAHSEE.

8. Can the student master the material with reduction in *DIFFICULTY* of material presented?

Ask: Accommodation: Can the student demonstrate the essential standards, but require reduction in task difficulty? Modification: Can the student participate in activities to achieve alternate individualized goals when the tasks are greatly reduced in difficulty?

9. Can the student participate in activities to master *ALTERNATE GOALS*, not completing work to master the standards?

Ask: Modification: Can the student participate in the least restrictive environment, working on highly individualized instruction? Assumption: High school diploma will not be attained if instruction to master standards is not delivered. Accommodation: Can the student work on alternate goals, while simultaneously demonstrating mastery of standards. (e.g., social pragmatics instruction during a time when other students are working on written language assignments far beyond this students ability-- for a student with Autism on grade level in reading with output difficulties)

10. Can the student master different curricular components, *ALTERNATE FUNCTIONAL SKILLS CURRICULUM* for a student with severe disabilities.

Ask: Can this student be included in the educational environment in which other students are working towards grade level standards mastery if his/her educational programming focuses on curricular domains to enhance quality of life, independence, leisure skills, etc.?